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City of Duluth Communications Office

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SUBJECT: Mayor Larson's Downtown Task Force announces recommendations in news conference today

BY: Kelli Latuska, Public Information Officer

Mayor Larson's Downtown Task Force announces recommendations in news conference today

[Duluth, MN] In a news conference held at Minnesota Surplus and Outfitters this afternoon, the City of Duluth and the Downtown Task Force summarized its recommendations after examining the needs of the Downtown neighborhood since April of 2022. The task force, which is comprised of various business and nonprofit leaders, as well as government staff and officials from both the City and the County, was tasked with providing recommendations in four key areas: downtown safety, activation, vision, and investment. The task force met nine times between April and October of 2022 to address challenges and strategize around recommendations that prioritize downtown's present and future as an important and vibrant neighborhood and business district.

"In my 2022 State of City, I put a stake in the ground: our downtown is too special to allow for any erosion of progress and growth," said Mayor Emily Larson. "With the challenging intersection all downtowns across the country are experiencing currently, we needed to convene some of our best thinkers and doers to reposition ourselves for long term prosperity within this neighborhood.

Convened by Co-Chairs Kristi Stokes of Downtown Duluth and Shaun Floerke of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, the 15-member Task Force has articulated a clear and aggressive agenda to support, grow, improve and activate our downtown. My sincere thanks to Kristi, Shaun and all Task Force members for your significant contribution of time and expertise to improving our community."

"For Duluth to grow and thrive, our Downtown must lead the way and overcome the current challenges we face together. I appreciate the significant investment of time, energy, and passion the Downtown Task Force members have offered these past five months to help chart a new trajectory for our Downtown," said Duluth City Council President Arik Forsman. "I look forward to working with my fellow city councilors to reinforce and adopt policies that align with the outcomes the Task Force has identified that we need - improved safety, increased activation, a clearly articulated vision, and accelerated investment in the heart of our city."

"Downtown is the heart of our community. I am pleased that task force members and the administration dedicated so much time and energy toward crafting recommendations that will further strengthen this vital business district," said Kristi Stokes, Task Force Co-chair and president of Downtown Duluth. "While we have faced challenges from the pandemic and road construction, we know we are on a positive path with increased support and tangible recommendations."

"One of the things I love most about Duluth is that people show up," said Shaun Floerke, Task Force Co-chair and president of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation. "I always tell folks who don't know Duluth that if you have a problem and ask ten people to come and help, you'll get at least eleven. It's been incredibly gratifying to see all the people who are showing up, taking action to help downtown. Task force members, city staff, but even more importantly a huge and growing group of concerned folks who care deeply about downtown: residents, business folks, property owners, nonprofits, artists, advocates and the list goes on and on. Much action has already happened and much is in the works. We offer these recommendations to support those efforts. We all know that the complex challenges will not be solved quickly or simply. But it will be solved. And it will be solved through good folks who care

coming together and taking action individually and collectively. That's what we do here."

"There has never been a better time than right now to invest in Duluth and more specifically in Downtown Duluth," said Duluth Chamber President and task force member Matt Baumgartner. "The work of our task force has shown that right now, the numbers pencil; there is strong demand; and we are ready with economic development incentives. A bet on Downtown Duluth is a winning bet."

During the past seven months, the task force consulted with experts, including now retired Chief of Police Mike Tusken, Chief Mike Ceynowa, City Attorney Rebecca St. George, Assistant County Attorney Nate Stumme, City of Duluth Deputy Director of Planning and Economic Development Adam Fulton, and national expert Michele Reeves of Civilis Consultants.

The Downtown Task Force was appointed by Mayor Larson April 28, 2022 and entrusted to examine, work, learn, ideate, and recommend strategies to advance Duluth's downtown across those four key areas: **safety, activation, vision, and investment.**

The full report and recommendations can be found on the City's website at:

<https://duluthmn.gov/mayor/downtown-task-force/>

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